

Loose Coupling as an Inhibitor of Internal Customer Knowledge Transfer: Findings from an Empirical Study in B-to-B Professional Services

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Abstract

Purpose and value of the paper

The knowledge of inhibitors of internal customer knowledge transfer in b-to-b professional service organizations is still in its infancy. Previous literature on professional service organizations has focused on knowledge processes on a general level without paying closer attention to inhibitors of internal knowledge transfer. This study contributes by increasing the knowledge of various inhibitors of customer-related knowledge transfer and their influence on customer-related knowledge utilization in collaborative customer relationships.

Methodology

The present empirical article is based on a case study of two professional service organizations in the field of business-to-business education and consultancy services. An in-depth analysis of organizations developing collaborative relationships was conducted.

Key findings

This article shows that internal fragmentation seems to be inherent in this type of organization, and may cause many problems in customer-related knowledge transfer among individuals, collegial groups and hierarchical levels in a professional service organization. All of these problems in collective knowledge utilization influence both the service offering creation and general relationship coordination in the collaborative relationship.

Practical implications

This paper also provides managerial suggestions for how to deal with the inhibitors of customer knowledge transfer. This includes developing unified goals, strengthening cultural cohesion and cooperation in the organization, building forums of dialogue between individuals and subgroups, and structuring relationship coordination systems (i.e. key account management systems) keeping customer-related knowledge transfer in mind.

Keywords: Collaborative customer relationship, customer knowledge, knowledge transfer, loosely coupled system, professional service organization.